

The Primacy of Values

A Conversation

with Ibrahim al-Houdaiby

THE IMPORTANCE OF EGYPT'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD CAN HARDLY BE exaggerated. Since its formal creation over eighty years ago, the Brotherhood (MB) has served as a definitive intellectual and organizational model for nearly all other manifestations of Islamism around the globe.

In Egypt today the Brotherhood exists as a quasi-illegal movement that portrays itself—and not without some truth—as the largest and most successful force of political opposition to the Egyptian regime. In 2005, the MB swept Egypt's legislative elections winning 20 percent of parliamentary seats. This was the biggest win ever for any opposition group—and it happened despite the repressive and fraudulent measures taken by the Egyptian regime and the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) to thwart the MB's electoral campaign.

Yet over the last five years, the Brotherhood has been unable to capitalize on its electoral successes. A series of secessions and internal feuds over governance and the movement's future direction have taken the massive and moribund organization by storm. In light of this internal crisis, the transformation of the MB's structure and intellectual platform—and consequently, of Islamism within Egypt and elsewhere—would seem necessary if the movement is to survive as a political party with popular appeal.

Ibrahim al-Houdaiby has a unique perspective on this matter. His great-grandfather, Hassan al-Houdaiby, became the MB's second General Guide after Hassan al-Banna, the founder and theoretical godfather of the movement, was assassinated in 1949. Hassan al-Houdaiby, a reputable and revered judge, established within the MB a tradition of non-violent political engagement with the Egyptian regime; his seminal book *Du'atun la Qudah* (*Preachers not Judges*) is seen by many as the authoritative counter-

argument to the revolutionary ideas of the infamous Brotherhood ideologue Said Qutb. Mamoun al-Houdaiby, Hassan's son and Ibrahim's grandfather, would later become the MB's sixth General Guide during the turbulent years of 2002-2004.

Despite his family's heritage, Ibrahim quit his position in the Brotherhood as an editor of its English language website for reasons he did not wish to disclose. He has since emerged as one of the MB's most outspoken Islamist critics. Ibrahim, who was born in 1983, is widely seen as a rising Islamist leader who also represents a new generation in Egyptian politics that has become disenchanted with the established ways of doing things and keen on finding practicable alternatives. The conversation with Ibrahim al-Houdaiby (I.H.) that follows was conducted with Amr Bargisi (A.B.), an Egyptian journalist and senior partner with the Egyptian Union of Liberal Youth, an organization established to promote classical liberalism within Egypt.

The Brotherhood's Crisis

A.B. How do you characterize the recent feud over internal elections in the MB?

I. H. The crisis originates in the dispute over the general direction of the MB, concerning its composition, function and objectives. There are three contesting ideological schools in the MB. The first derives directly from Hassan al-Banna's intellectual foundation, which was an extension of a reform movement within Al-Azhar, the famous Sunni theological seminary based in Cairo. The second revolves around Said Qutb's ideas, and focuses mainly on political organization. The third, which invaded the Islamist movement and, indeed, Egyptian society in its entirety since the 1970s, is Wahhabism, which is essentially materialistic and externalistic in its approach to Islam.

The MB was always able to reach a compromise between competing ideological schools with the help of its historic leadership, which included a founding generation that derived part of its authority from the fact that it had worked with Hassan al-Banna in one way or another. In the past few years, two things have been going on simultaneously. First, the MB's founding generation is becoming extinct, while the process of institutionalizing the movement is still immature. The organizational bylaws of the MB were not published and virtually unattainable, even by members, until a few months ago. Without clear organizational rules, the decline of the leadership's historical legitimacy had to end in internal conflict over a new source of legitimacy.

Second, the strategic vision of the MB has been blurred by incessant compromises both within the organization as well as with the regime. There is no clear conception of the MB's ultimate objectives: is the MB a political organization seeking public office or is it a social movement with no interest in direct political engagement? Or is the MB at most a pressure group? All of these models exist indecisively in Hassan al-Banna's work, but the founder's writings remain ambiguous about which model is best for the movement.

This vagueness over strategic objectives has affected the MB's recruitment heavily, as it allows for an indefinite caliber of recruits being admitted to the organization. These recruits join for a range of personal reasons, with some looking for spiritual salvation, and others looking for political reform, for social alternatives or for material benefit, etc. This looks exactly like a man who is eating too much, putting on weight under the illusion that it's muscle where it is purely fat. Once the MB decides to move in any direction, it will have to lose a great deal of this weight.

This has led to the Brotherhood's adoption of a defensive strategy that aims at nothing else but the preservation of the organization. Said Qutb's ideas, stressing withdrawal from larger society, or "un-Islam," are vital to this tendency, but ideas thrive only in fertile soil. The monopoly the MB holds on the Islamist arena in Egypt has created a context where the unity of the organization takes priority at the expense of ideas and sometimes even ethics. I don't doubt these people's sincerity, but I can't accept oxymoronic concepts like "lying for God"—i.e. justifying lying to protect the organization—which a few members of the organization often resort to.

- A.B. But the MB's monopoly over Islamism cannot explain the movement's tendency to prioritize the survival of the organization, since all other political groups suffer the same problem.
- I.H. This is due to the highly restrictive social and political environment imposed by the regime, allowing for a limited number of political entities to legally exist. The MB is the one major entity that exists illegally, and the regime makes sure that it remains unified, violently crushing any potential Islamist alternative.
- A.B. But the legal context also does not fully explain this trend. This might have been the case a while ago, when there was a desperate need to protect organizations from repressive measures. But now, especially with the new era of openness in

Egyptian society that was introduced with the political reforms of 2005,¹ this organizational protectionism is no longer a practical measure, but rather an irrational obsession.

I. H. I agree. A member of the Guidance Bureau has given us one peculiar example of this irrationality with a recent article. He wrote that “insightful people know that the MB is neither a means nor an end, it’s a duty.”² They are trying very hard to avoid any questions about the purpose of the organization.

A. B. Back to the MB’s internal crisis: my intuition is that the fight is essentially ideological and not organizational.

I. H. This is hard to judge. For many people, the organizational questions define ideology. The Brotherhood’s mentality—and the Egyptian mentality in general—has become unable to discern ideological contradictions, and therefore, ideas are not by any means a core issue. One Brotherhood legislator declared on TV that “the MB no longer adopts violence since the publication of *Du’atun La Qudah*.” But fewer new MB recruits read *Du’atun La Qudah* than those who read Said Qutb’s *Maalim Ala At-Tareeq (Milestones)*. More dangerously, those who read both are not able to grasp the contradiction between their different teachings. The official MB mouthpiece, *Ikhwan Online*, disseminates many contradictory messages, and you find commentators praising everything brainlessly. This is not to suggest the MB members adopt violence in any way. They don’t. Their understanding of Qutb’s writings does not include the use of violence, only detachment from the society, focus on organizational empowerment and building a strict Islamic organization.

A. B. The absurdity of Egyptian politics is not limited to the MB. Take the word “democracy,” for instance. It has come to mean nothing at all—we know that it’s something “good,” but nothing else.

I. H. This is another good example. When a group of members defied one decision by the General Guide, they hailed this defiance as democratic, although it was, in this particular case, an outrageous breach of the organization’s bylaws. However, assuming that the conflict is purely ideological between “conservatives” and “reformers” is superfluous. The division itself is naive; I am trying to come up with a more coherent classification. I would first divide members of the MB over religious views—including conservative or moderate; second, over political behavior—such as principled ideological or pragmatic organizational; and third on moral behavior—including ethical or utilitarian.

Revision or Conservation?

- A.B. The MB at its earliest stages was in spirit closer to Western religious conservative movements; regardless of political organization, it was focused on the concepts of honor, integrity, chastity, honesty, etc. The major question facing the MB, before it fell victim to repression and took recourse to the aforementioned defensive and inward-looking strategy, was how to modernize while hanging on to *Turath*—that is, the heritage of Islamic scholarship and civilization. Today, this is still an important question, as a large sector of the MB audience is very similar to their predecessors in 1928, the year the MB was founded. The MB’s penetration is highest in rural areas, small towns and college dorms. In a modern context, the MB member was for a long time “the stranger.” There is, however, a new element of MB activists who are, like you, already modernized and globalized.
- I.H. True. I once accompanied a senior member of the Brotherhood to a huge shopping mall in Cairo and asked him to take a look around and tell me if the MB knows how to talk to these people. He had no answer. But in the past few years, two developments of great importance took place. First, the greater openness of Egyptian society since 2005 has forced young Islamist activists—people who would, for instance, previously have refused to act alongside unveiled female demonstrators—to engage with society on new terms, and to participate in a new youth activist culture that involves all colors of the socio-political spectrum including unveiled women. Once these religious activists realized they were not angels and that everyone else were not devils, they had to rethink the preconceptions of the “God bless you community,” as my shaykh calls it—i.e. the community of the sanctimonious and ever-pious. The second is the emergence of cyberspace transcending all social and economic barriers.
- A.B. When I imagine you in Said Qutb’s shoes on his infamous visit to America, I imagine you would behave differently than he did. There are certain things about modern life that you, just as others from the new generation of Islamists, appear to take for granted, and no longer see as alien as Qutb did. For example, you will not, as Qutb once did, visit a museum simply to observe how Americans react to art. You would go to enjoy yourself regardless of other people’s reactions. The questions that you ask of yourself and of your society must be different as modernity for you is no longer a source of confusion—as it was for Qutb.

I. H. Absolutely. My major question is concerned with the “ultimate ethical reference” or the “guiding value system.” For instance, despite my strong belief in *hijab* as an Islamic obligation for women, I have a very negative opinion of the recent prevalence of *hijab* in Egypt. Islamists attacked the West for its objectification of the female body, but the Islamists have reverted to the same exact discourse: instead of using the body as a commodity as they argue western society does, the Islamists call it a “jewel” that should be covered and safeguarded for the pleasure of the husband. Nowadays, the Islamists measure their success by the number of veiled women in the street, where the value system that forced these women to cover their heads is as far from Islam as public nudity is. What matters to me is to escape the materialism of Western Modernity that reduces Man to one dimension and robs him of his human dignity and individuality.

A.B. Do you consider this approach of yours, which I believe is appealing to many others, a revision of the MB’s foundations or a return to them?

I. H. It’s a mixture of both. First, Hassan al-Banna started the MB when he was twenty-two years old and died when he was forty-two. Like us, when he started the group his views were far from maturity or completion, and indeed, historical testimonies show that he was on the verge of a revision of his own work just before his assassination. So it would be an enormous mistake to read all his work as if it were one solid and fixed statement. On one occasion, he wrote to the MB as a whole: “You are a new soul to the body of the Muslim Nation that shall revive it by Quran;” on another he said, “We are Islam”—which is a scary slogan. I try, rather, to review his work in the light of his own guiding principles, which are by no means far from my own approach. On the other hand, Hassan al-Banna is one of the manifestations of a much larger movement. It is unfair to ask him to provide for everything.

A.B. You want to read him with the help of Mohammed Abduh³ and Rashid Rida⁴?

I. H. I have some reservations with Abduh, Rida and Jamaluddin al-Afghani;⁵ they all represent variations of revolution against *turath*, or the heritage of Islamic scholarship. They have been privileged in our reading of modern Islamic thought because they were the ones most spoken to and about by the West. There are other scholars whom we seem to forget: Ibrahim Al-Bagoury, Selim al-Bishry, Hassouna An-Nawawy⁶ and Yousef El-Digwy,⁷ among others. There is a complex network of *turath* that cannot be reduced to Hassan al-Banna, no matter how important and influential he was. It is absurd to believe—following the official MB

discourse—that people thought Islam was nothing but prayer until Hassan al-Banna came around wearing Superman’s cape and changed everything. It is enough to read the works of major thinkers of al-Banna’s time to see how Islam influenced enormously the way they approached politics, society and economy. The main difference about Hassan al-Banna is that he decided to start an organization, and it was one of his major mistakes that he assumed the role of both the theoretical godfather and the leader of the organization. He should have expanded the MB’s theoretical base to include others and focused on building the organization. Another, almost fatal, mistake of al-Banna’s was keeping the different aspects of his project totally disconnected, with him being the sole connector, the only one capable of putting together the different pieces of the puzzle. After his assassination—and therefore, with the disappearance of the one link tying everything together—this became a huge problem as each branch of the MB started acting on its own. The most prominent example is the MB militia—the “Special Apparatus”—who considered themselves to be the sole representatives of Islam. They refused to comply with Hassan al-Houdaiby’s decree to dissolve the militias, so they broke into his house and put a gun to his head.

Reading the Brotherhood’s History

A.B. In light of this revision/return, how do you read the history of the Brotherhood?

I.H. I think the MB has two major problems with history—especially their history during the Nasserist era. First, they refuse to admit to any of their mistakes past the 1940s. Even when they do admit to certain mistakes—like the assassination of Judge Al-Khazindar⁸ and Prime Minister Al-Noqrashy⁹ in 1948—they insist that they were based on “misinterpretations” by the Special Apparatus of instructions from civil leadership. They never admitted that the very existence of the Special Apparatus was a mistake. The existence of this outfit has twice allowed for the emergence of an armed wing, which has been loosely connected to the MB’s leadership. In 1954, an attempt to assassinate Nasser was discovered and then manipulated by the regime to deal a hammer blow to the Brotherhood as a whole and consolidate Nasser’s grip over power. Then, in 1965, exactly the same scenario occurred again when an armed group led by Said Qutb was infiltrated and arrested just one day after they had acquired weapons.

Second, there is a persistent tendency towards secrecy among those who witnessed those turbulent events. The number of testimonies available is very limited,

making it very difficult to grasp and evaluate what actually happened. Now I have to make myself clear here: this Special Apparatus was originally established for the most honorable and moral purposes: resisting foreign occupation. I have nothing against that. But, as Tarek El-Bishry¹⁰ notes, when organizations have political and military wings, military wings usually go out of control and make decisions on their own. They have the guns at the end of the day.

A.B. But the image is somewhat clearer after President Anwar Sadat allowed for the unofficial return of the MB?

I.H. Not really. We know that Sadat allowed some space for Islamists, particularly in the universities, to pursue social activism in exchange for supporting him in his fight against the Nasserists and the Communists. But Sadat didn't really empower the MB in any way; he intentionally gave space for the Wahhabists to counter-balance the MB. This eventually cost Sadat his life—as a violent combination of the ideas of the MB, Qutbism and Wahhabism emerged—despite the president's mastery of pragmatic calculations. On the other hand, it is still unclear what Umar El Tilmisany, the MB's General Guide at the time, had in mind. Various testimonies assert that he refused to reintroduce the MB as an official political party despite welcoming gestures from the regime. Was this part of a deal? Was it some form of political shrewdness? Or had he reached the conclusion that the MB should not pursue a political agenda?

A.B. It could not have been the latter. Once the MB got the chance, they contested the 1984 parliamentary elections in a fragile alliance with the Al-Wafd Party,¹¹ which was based on each party's attempts to manipulate the joint electoral list rather than on a concrete and common agenda.

I.H. True, but even when the MB had formed a deeper alliance with the Al-Amal Party in 1987,¹² the original question remained: why is the MB running for parliament in the first place? I am not for or against it; it just seems too ambiguous to me. Even in the 1990s, when the regime permitted the Brotherhood a large space for social action and *dawa* in its campaign to counter Islamist groups professing revolutionary violence, the vagueness of the MB's political position persisted.

A.B. This takes us directly to the MB's stunning electoral victory of 2005—a period in which you personally took part. The MB won 88 seats, the largest opposition win ever—and then after that success, there was an equally stunning failure of the MB to rise up to the occasion.

I. H. It's even worse than that. According to recent statements by the former General Guide Mahdi Akif, the regime early in the elections struck a deal with two members of the MB Guidance Bureau—without anyone else within the MB knowing—for a smaller but still significant number of seats. The result was an uncalculated rush during and after the first phase of the election, as the MB broke the deal they were not aware of, thereby provoking the regime to resort to violent measures in the next two phases. This is not to suggest that the MB does not have the right to pursue more seats, but only highlights the lack of strategic thinking within the MB. The question remains: why does the MB need 88 law makers? Even if you take the typical defensive strategy argument that leads the MB to seek a minimal “legal frontline,” or a degree of legitimate political representation necessary to protect its interests, 10 members of parliament would've been sufficient. Instead, the MB was lured by the potential of unnecessary success, failing to notice that they are offering the regime a perfect pretext for more repression by waving the scarecrow of Islamism in the face of international and domestic protesters.

A.B. I also want to talk about parliamentary performance. After five years, very few among the 88 Brotherhood parliamentarians have proven successful.

I. H. Even before parliamentary performance, it is ridiculous that the legislation they proposed had nothing to do whatsoever with either the MB political program draft or the reform initiative of 2004. Most of the MB parliamentarians are merely preaching, but this is again dictated by the political context. The typical candidate is either a businessman or an imam. You or I would not be able to get 50 votes. But you don't even have to work from within the parliament; with 88 lawmakers the MB could have revolutionized politics in Egypt. At one time, I suggested they should knock on ordinary people's doors and say, “Hello, we're the MB. These are our law drafts and the issues discussed in the next parliamentary session. If you have suggestions, please come by our office.” My argument is that ordinary people must feel they have some interest in politics.

A.B. This is a general problem in Egyptian politics—that Egyptians are excluded from any calculation except as variables you seek to control, regardless of their actual needs and aims.

I. H. And the MB's chance to change that has been lost. A few months from now, at election time, the MB will be asked about their achievements since 2005 and they will have nothing to say. If they say they helped with local services, it will be self-defeating since they would be challenging the NDP in its own game.

The MB possesses a formidable organizational machine that so far has been poorly utilized. The MB failed to affect the 2006 constitutional amendments, as it was lured by the regime into a futile conflict over the almost-redundant second article stating that Sharia is the major source for legislation. They failed to appoint even two or three women to the group’s legislative council—a move that would’ve saved them from the ridiculous reiterations on women’s rights. They failed to fully adopt and lead the agenda of the Egyptian national movement, and transform themselves from a mainstream Islamic movement to a mainstream national movement. They have not properly addressed the West. The failures of the MB, and of the Islamist movement in general, are enormous.

The Totality of Islam

- A.B. Despite the failures you have just depicted, the Islamists, I argue, have achieved substantial success in the field of political theory—not so much in the development of their own theory, but in shaping how everybody else thinks about politics in Muslim societies. The argument that societies in which Islam is the religion of the majority need a particular Islamic theory of politics, or what I call “the Islamic Society Hypothesis,” has become predominant among Islamists and non-Islamists alike.
- I.H. Any attempt to explain and prescribe for human behavior on the basis of religion alone is utterly superfluous. There is a basic humanistic ground that defines all human beings. Religion, among other factors, introduces various differences among groups and individuals—yet the common ground for all humankind is still very wide. Despite this, I still have a firm belief in the “totality of Islam”—i.e. that Islam has to do with everything in my life.
- A.B. But this “totality of Islam” is a faith-based principle; you still need a rational grounding to introduce your ideas in public.
- I.H. Rationality is not value-free. I have the right to ground my arguments in my own value system, and I don’t have to seek a false common ground with anyone. This also applies to you as a liberal; you don’t have to justify your opinions from within Sharia, and neither do I for that matter. I take from the ethical foundation of Islam that my only obligation is not to contradict Sharia, which is not all that difficult. The space for difference and diversity in *turath* is almost infinite when it comes to practical politics, not to mention intellectual

efforts. I believe that there is not a single issue where the present Egyptian regime contradicts an Islamic jurisprudence consensus.

A.B. Does this mean that a projected Islamic Regime is one that takes its legitimacy from popular consent and not from scripture or the principle of God's absolute and indivisible sovereignty, *Hakimiyya*?

I.H. There is no need whatsoever to put these two sources of legitimacy in contradiction. I totally believe in the rule of Sharia but I reject any argument for its imposition by an authoritarian regime against the will of the people. Politics is the final manifestation of ideas, so if the Islamists cannot face certain ideas, minor or major, on the intellectual and social levels, they must allow for them to take political form. A pre-defined political space on the basis of scriptural or even popular legitimacy ends—as in the Iranian case—with excessive repression.

A.B. So what do you think is the role of the state in the Islamist approach?

I.H. First, there is no such thing as *the* Islamist approach. I endorse the guided caliphate,¹³ the Abassids and the present Turkish regime as examples of government by Muslims. Personally, I don't have a specific conception of the role of the state; I think it changes according to the demands of society. I accept both the socialist and liberal models as possibilities, though I am leaning more towards the former, considering Egypt's development priorities.

A.B. Do you believe the state should engage in social engineering—for example, by pursuing Islamic *dawa*? Should there be a ministry of information or of culture, as is the case in Egypt at the moment? Should the state supervise education?

I.H. Ministries for information and culture—no, that's preposterous. Education—yes, to the extent that it helps to preserve the convention, not the unity, among the members of society. But I don't believe the state should be the sole provider of education. As for *dawa*, it is by no means the role of the state. It used to be so in the time of the original guided caliphate, but that was at a time when the state was much less sophisticated and much less dominant vis-à-vis society. One of the major problems of Islamist thought at the moment is that it's locked up in historical models which are, in my opinion, reflections of their historical context and not necessarily applicable to the present day.

A.B. Once again, it's not only the Islamists who suffer from this problem. There are

no concrete normative models from the far left to the far right; everyone sets out from empirical models, historical or contemporary.¹⁴

I.H. Exactly. You can't even generalize from a successful contemporary model, let alone the ridiculous argument made by some Islamists for one caliphate and one ruler which was never realized empirically. Consider the present Turkish model which, despite all pressures and reservations, provides an excellent example of a modern Islamic state. However, I don't think Turkey's model is applicable or even achievable in Egypt. If post-Ataturk Turkey had a strong discriminatory stance against Islamism and its ideals, Egypt's regime has a stance against its *opposition*. It's always easier to work out solutions when the conflict is ideological as opposed to structural or constitutional.

On the other hand, an Islamist normative approach is yet to emerge because the Islamist project itself is not complete. There are many fundamental questions that haven't been asked by Islamists as they are always excluded as secondary. This is largely due to the prevalence of Qutbism, which considers intellectual debate over concrete and practicable alternatives to be evidence of Islam's psychological and spiritual defeat by the West.

Islamism's Future

A.B. How do you see the future of the Muslim Brotherhood?

I.H. It is impossible to answer this question at the moment. The MB is facing forthcoming involuntary changes with every decision and every statement it makes. There are major issues at hand, particularly the parliamentary and presidential elections, in addition to less urgent but more complex social questions. However, my expectations are lower than my hopes.

A.B. What about the Islamist movement in general?

I.H. I think that if more political and social openness is introduced, the MB, as well as the less significant Islamist groups, will be totally transcended, as the Islamic reference will remain and will be manifested in more sophisticated and mature organizations and movements.

A.B. You don't see yourself as part of this development?

I.H. I hope. Although I believe this sort of development is beyond the writings or actions of individuals. It's the context that brings about the ideas—as was the case with Said Qutb, whose parochial and inward-looking thinking reflected the fact that he lived under Nasser's repressive rule. Today, the regime is pushing the Islamist movement away from moderation, especially with its insistence on keeping the Islamists away from Al-Azhar. I believe that Al-Azhar is the one institution that could transform the Islamist movement. If this policy of the regime toward blocking Islamism at Al-Azhar is pursued, the Islamist movement will increasingly revert to ignorance, fanaticism and seclusion.

A.B. Is there something you'd like to convey to the serious Western reader interested in Islamism?

I.H. First, generalizations are almost always false; even the basic concepts—like Sharia and jihad—have widely diverse interpretations. Second, anyone who studies Islamism from outside must first drop all the illusions of supremacy; they must see the issues as the Islamists see them. They must accept that the differences between their systems of values and those of the Islamists are not the outcome of them being on a higher step on the ladder of historical progress, but are rather deep intellectual and conceptual differences, and should not, therefore, be expected to vanish. Islamism is the offspring of a different human experience in a different historical context.

NOTES

1. The Egyptian regime—under heavy pressure from the Bush administration, among other factors such as social and economic change—introduced a series of political reforms in 2005, allowing for multi-candidate presidential elections for the first time and granting a much larger space for public debate in the media.
2. “On the Balance between formation and movement or individual and group—1,” Dr. Mohammed Abdel Rahaman, Ikhwanonline.com, December 13, 2009. Available at: <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=57708&SecID=0>
3. Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) was an Islamic reformer and Egyptian nationalist, known for his attempt to rationalize Islamic jurisprudence.
4. Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935) was one of Abduh's dedicated disciples, often considered a forerunner of modern day Islamism.
5. Jamaluddin Al-Afghani (1838-1897) is widely considered as the godfather of modern pan-Islamism. His political ideas were very influential in Egypt as well as the rest of the Muslim world.

6. Ibrahim Al-Bagoury(1784-1860), Selim El-Bishry(1832-1916) and Hassouna An-Nawawy(1839-1924) were influential Islamic scholars and former Grand Shaykhs of Al-Azhar.
7. Yousef El-Digwy (1870-1948) was a renowned Islamic scholar. His most famous work, “Messages of Peace: a treatise on Islam,” is available in English.
8. Ahmed Al-Khazindar was an Egyptian judge, assassinated in 1948 by the MB’s Special Apparatus in retaliation for sentencing a group of MB militants to life in prison for attacking British soldiers.
9. Mahmoud Fahmy Al-Noqrashy was twice Prime Minister of Egypt, assassinated in 1948 by the Special Apparatus during his second term. Al-Noqrashy had dissolved the MB in the aftermath of the Palestine War (Israeli Independence War).
10. Tarek El-Bishry (1933-) is an Egyptian historian, Islamist thinker and former judge. His writings are very influential and respected, especially among academics. He is considered one of the major “moderate” Islamist intellectuals.
11. Al-Wafd is the oldest still-existing Egyptian political party. It was a dominant political force in the years before 1952. After the restoration of political parties in 1978, Al-Wafd, which has often been deemed “liberal,” has played a major role as an opposition faction, only to witness significant decline with the rise of the MB and, more recently, non-partisan opposition movements.
12. The Al-Amal Party’s original left-wing agenda was overshadowed by a de-facto take over by the Islamists since 1987. The Labor Party has been frozen by the government since 2000.
13. The original Muslim caliphate, led by Prophet Muhammad and the four “Rightly Guided-Caliphs.”
14. For instance, the human rights movement in Egypt grounds itself in the International Instruments of Human Rights, but fails to offer any normative argument for the universality or validity of Human Rights.